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KANDINSKY

November 12—December 14, 1957

galerie chalette
1100 madison ave., new york 28, n. y.

Cover: GREEN IN A CIRCLE, 1927.
Nr 221 — Gouache. 26 x 12⅝"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to thank the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Mr. and Mrs. Leo Glass and an anonymous collector for their generous loans of paintings, and the Galerie Maeght for invaluable assistance in preparing this exhibition.

Photographs by Ross Lowell

Homage to Wassily Kandinsky*

by MAX BILL

In the year 66 of our twentieth century we shall solemnly celebrate the centenary of the birth of Kandinsky. It will then be sixty years since the death of Paul Cézanne. And just as today Cézanne belongs unquestionably to the history of art, in 1966 Kandinsky's place will be similarly obvious even to those who today are still dubious of the meaning and value of his art.

Though Kandinsky himself successfully described his painting as « abstract », then as « absolute » and finally as « concrete », his friends are no more in uniform agreement today about these various terms than are his interpreters. This example, which may seem trivial, has nevertheless the importance of showing why we deem it desirable, and even preferable, to let Kandinsky speak for himself through his works. For the labels which he himself or others might have given to his creation are less stable, less eternal, than the work. The work itself exists, solid and potent. An inexhaustible power of invention generated it. A neverfailing discipline, joined to a lofty consciousness of artistic responsibilities, found fulfillment in it. And it is not only in each of the canvases, not in the work as a whole, but rather in Kandinsky's entire life that an exemplary unity is revealed to us.

The Painter Kandinsky

by ALBERTO MAGNELLI

Kandinsky's work speaks freely of itself, is so evident while each cycle of evolution is impregnated with his strong personality, that it is almost useless to talk about it; the quantity and the quality of Kandinsky's pictures have a perfect eloquence in themselves. With the lapse of time and as his work penetrates the spirit of humanity, we will become better acquainted with his supreme value.

*The following paragraphs are excerpts from "WASSILY KANDINSKY" by MAX BILL, 1951. The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, in association with Maeght, Editeur, Paris.

There are beings whose temperaments are fashioned with energy, courage and faith, whose whole existence is one of combat. They are the first to achieve understanding, love, and to communicate the warmth of their emotions. Kandinsky was one of these and one of the greatest. He is a painter in the true sense of the word. His entire soul worked, absorbed and expressed itself. He possessed complete understanding of his urge to create, of his mission and of those problems most in keeping with his genius; he passed from one work to another with the assurance of men confident in their own truth. Whatever Kandinsky's means of expression, be it graphic or colour, his vision ardent, calm or elegiac, according to age or period, it is fundamentally his very own.

Kandinsky the Poet

by JEAN ARP

In 1912 I visited Kandinsky in Munich. He welcomed me with great kindness. It was the period when abstract art was beginning to turn into concrete art, that is, avant-garde painters were no longer setting themselves in front of an apple, a guitar, a man, or a landscape in order to convert or resolve them into colored circles, triangles and rectangles, but rather were creating directly, out of their innermost joy and most personal suffering, autonomous lines, planes, forms, colors and compositions. Kandinsky was one of the first, certainly the first, to paint images of this kind deliberately and, as a poet, to write poems corresponding to them.

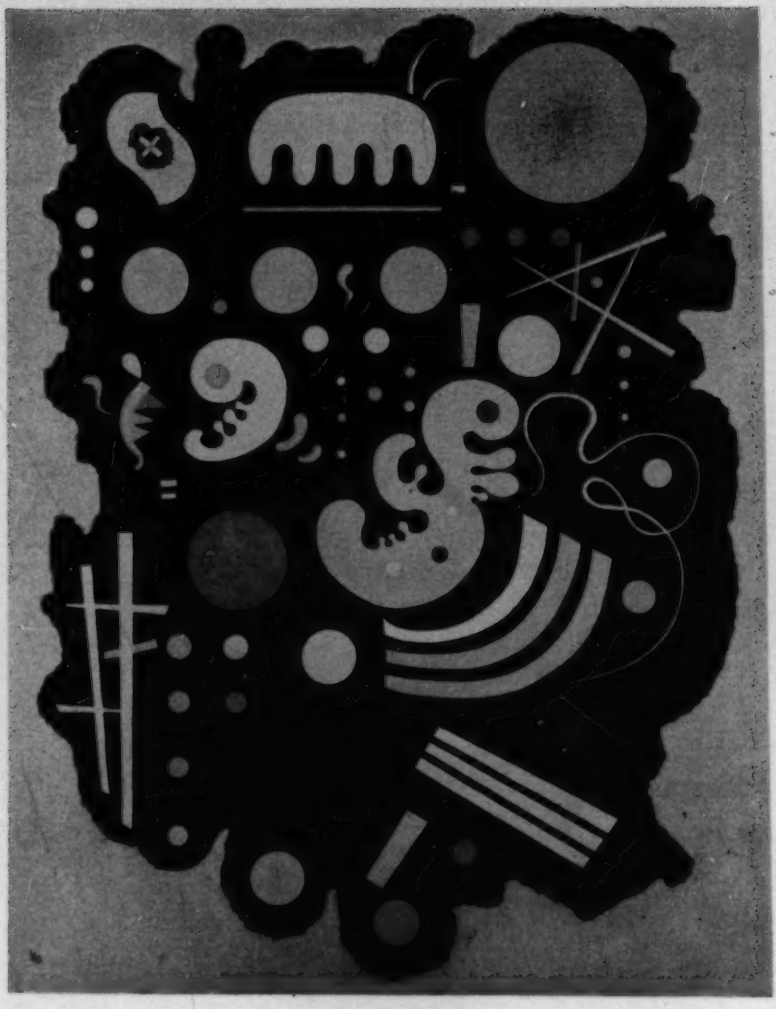
Kandinsky spoke to me at great length, with gentleness, liveliness and humor. In his studio, word, form and color were fused and transformed into fabulous, fantastic worlds hitherto unseen. Through the roaring and tumult of these worlds I could still make out, by paying sharp attention, the tinkling of the bright and multi-colored mushroom-towns of Russia. Kandinsky told me that his grand-father had come trotting into Russia on the back of a small charger that was spangled with bells, arriving from one of those enchanted Asiatic mountains all made of porcelain. There is no doubt that this grandfather had bequeathed deep secrets to Kandinsky.

Kandinsky the Educator

by MAX BILL

Kandinsky's work as a teacher began in 1912 when he established a private school of painting in Munich. But it was in Moscow, from 1918 to 1921, that he was to engage in educational activity on a large scale.

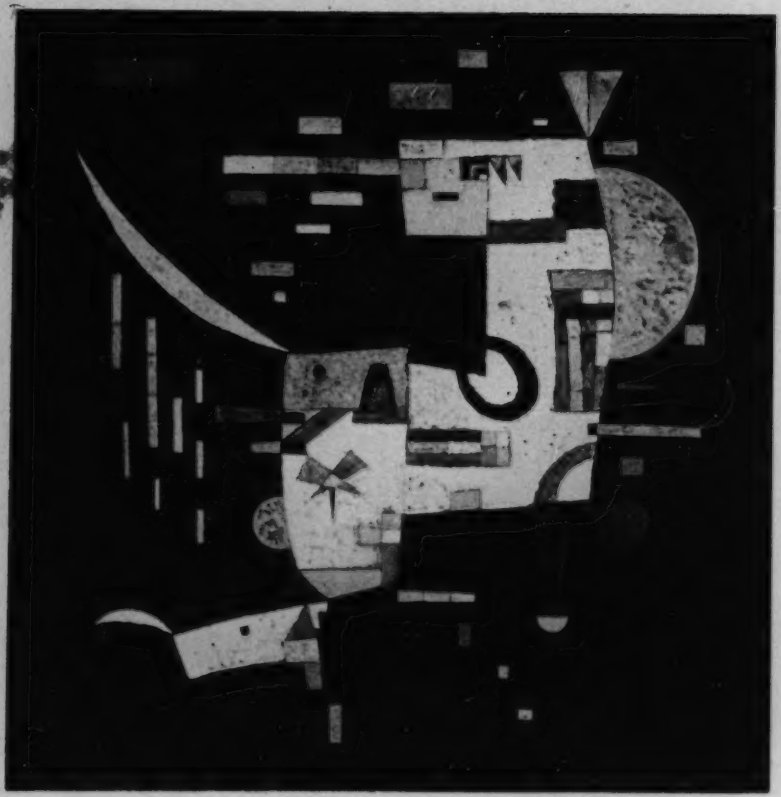
2. SOME POINTS, 1925.
Nr 292 — Oil on board. 28 x 19¾"



3. DIVERSIFIED BLACK, 1935.
Nr 620 — Oil on canvas. 46 x 35 1/8"

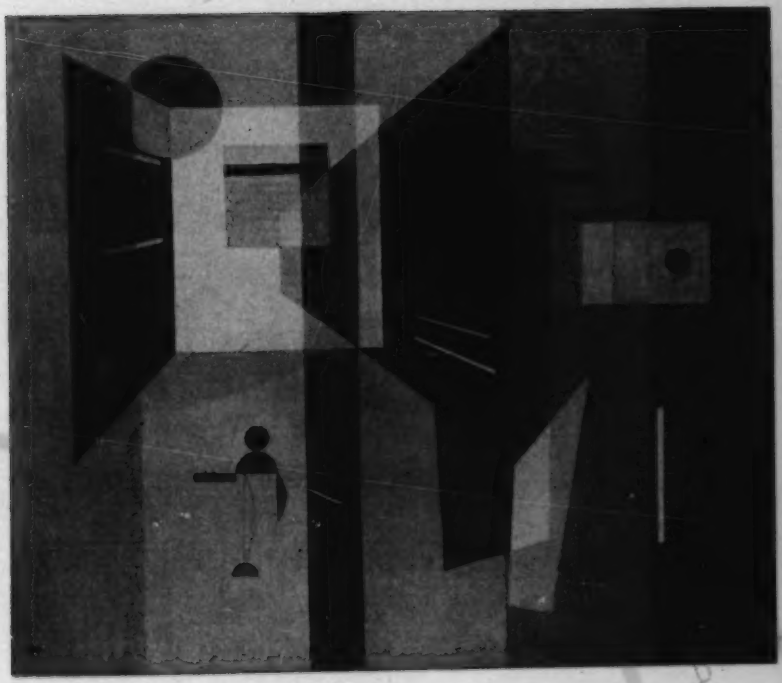
4. LOOSE DENSE, 1926.
Nr 369 — Oil on burlap. 43 7/8 x 39 5/8"
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

5. DEFIANT, 1933.
Nr 586 — Oil on Canvas. 28 x 28"
Private collection.



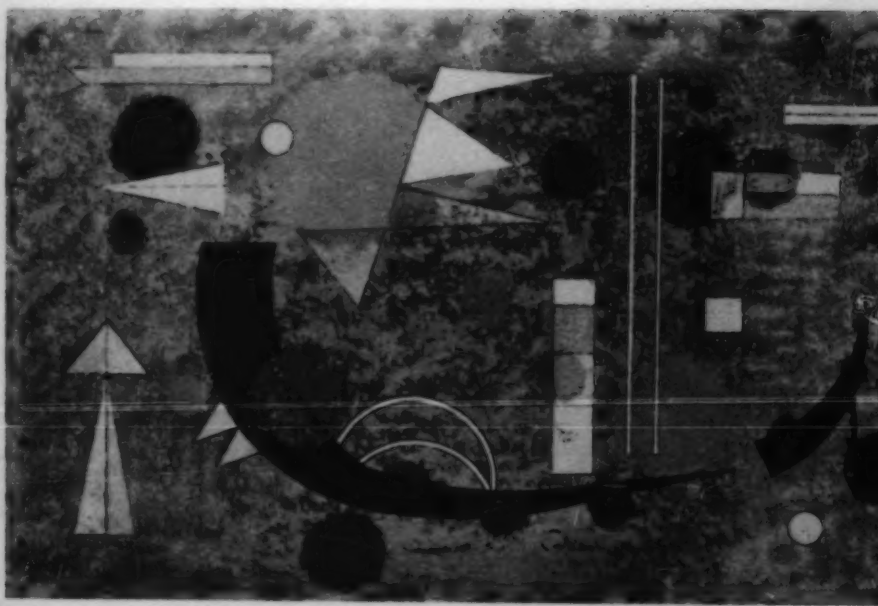
6. GROUP, 1937.
Nr 644 — Oil on canvas. 57 1/2 x 35 1/8"

7. WHITE PENTAGON, 1928.
Oil on board. 30¾ x 21"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Glass



8. RIGHT LEFT, 1932.
Nr 574 — Oil on canvas. 23¾ x 27½"

9. WORKING TOGETHER, 1929.
Nr 487 — Oil on board. 11 x 17"

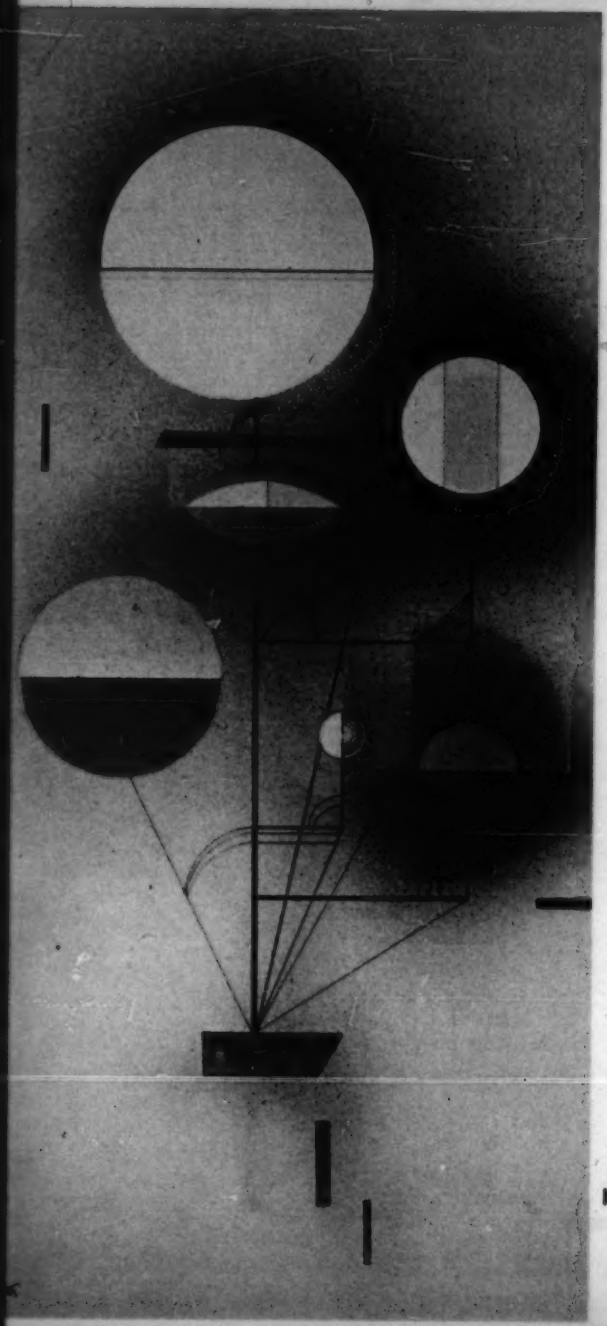


10. FREELY ACCENTED, 1930.
Nr 510 — Oil on board. 19⅜ x 27⅜"

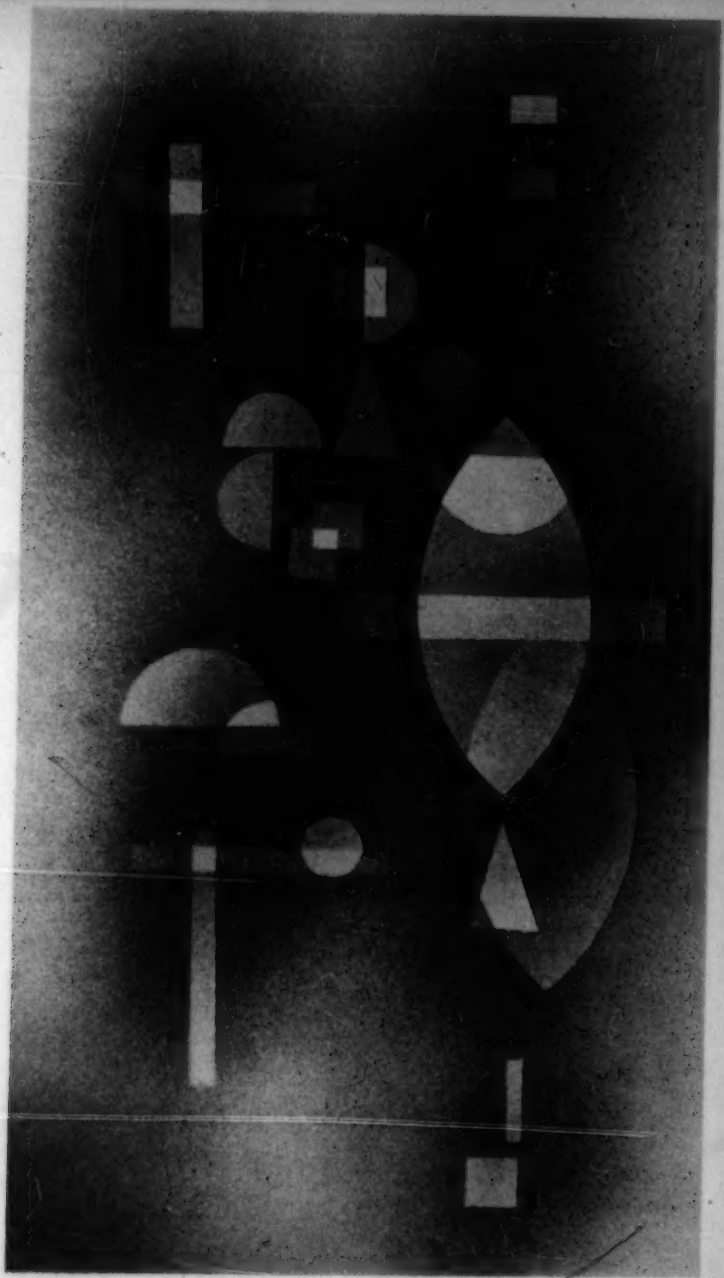
11. ROCKING, 1925.
Nr 291 — Oil on canvas. 28 x 20"
Private collection

12. WARM COOL, 1927. Nr 406 — Oil on board. 15 x 20"

13. UNTITLED COMPOSITION, 1941. Nr 719 — Gouache. 12½ x 19½"

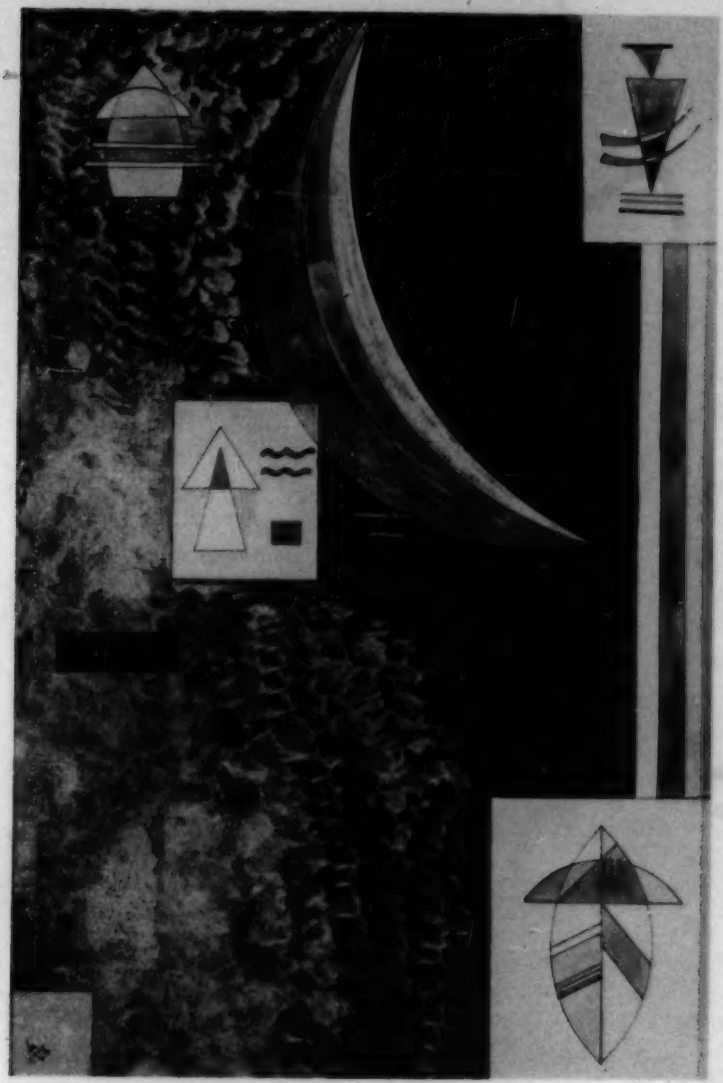


14. POWERLESS TIES, 1929.
NR 354 — Watercolor.
26⅝ x 13⅛"

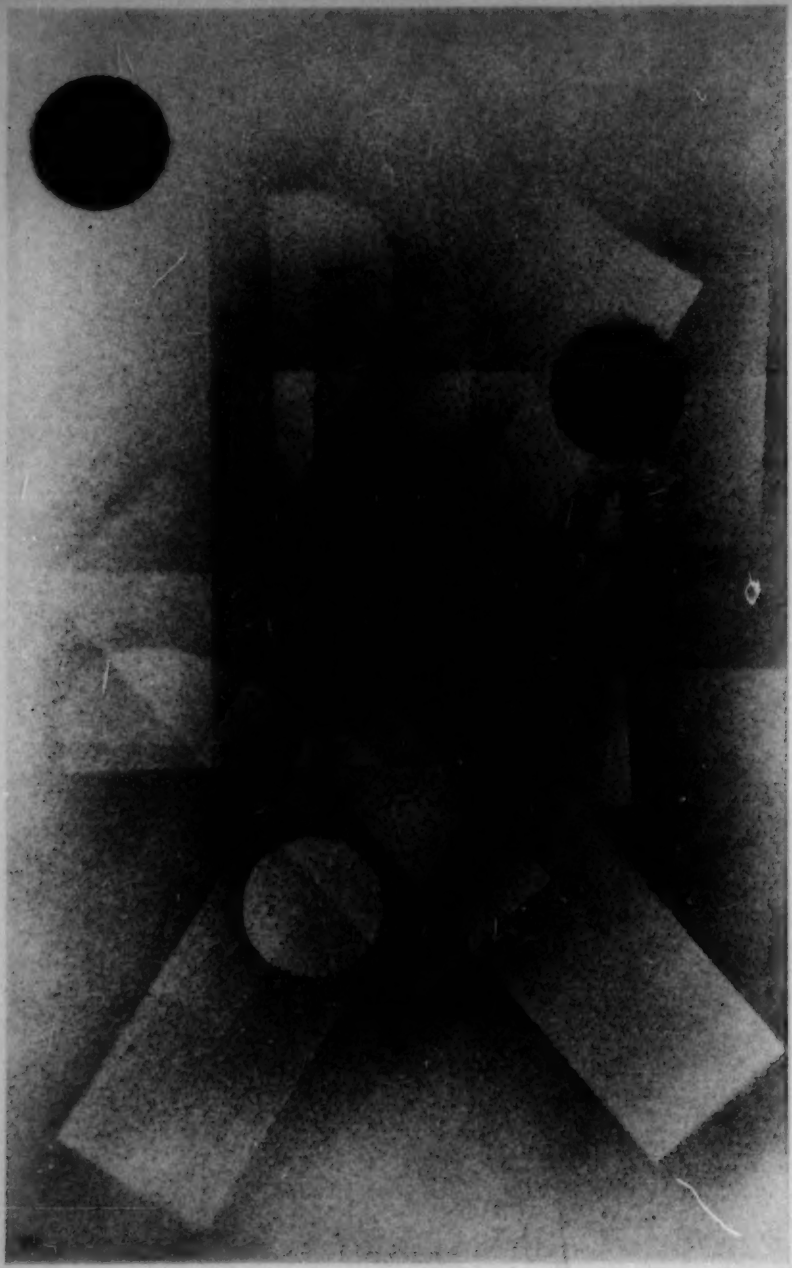


15. TRANSPARANCE, 1930. Nr 398 — Watercolor. 19½ x 11⅛"

16. BAGATELLE, 1936.
Nr 570 — Watercolor.
19½ x 7½"



17. **SHARP — 1928.** Nr 253 — Gouache. 19 1/8 x 12 1/2"



18. PALE PINK — 1929. Nr 294 — Watercolor. 21 x 13⅝"

However, his real pedagogic work was not to begin until 1922 when he was appointed professor in the « Bauhaus » which had been founded by Walter Gropius in 1919. From that date until the closing of the famous institution in 1933 Kandinsky remained faithful to the Bauhaus. He followed it in its removal from Weimar to Dessau and then from Dessau to Berlin. He continued to teach there until the Nazis closed the school. Soon after, he went to live in Paris.

Thus, for almost eleven years Kandinsky participated in the work of the Bauhaus, not only as teacher but also as assistant-director; and not by the example of his own work alone, but also by knowing how to be for each individual a friend and adviser. Kandinsky was aware of the deep impression made upon young students by an introduction to a study of the problems inherent in the art of our time, such as presented in the preliminary course; just as he was aware of the invaluable importance, for his teaching and therefore for his pupils, of the possibility of showing them in the unconventional, non-dogmatic and quite personal way which was the result of his own experience as an artist, the meaning of the evolution of painting conceived as a formal discipline.

Kandinsky the Theoretician

by C. GIEDON-WELCKER

Though almost all medieval art proceeded from a symbolism of ideas, neither painting nor sculpture, which gave a visible and tangible form to this spiritual conception of the world, was raised to the same level. It remained for modern times to promote the painter's and sculptor's creations to the rank of spiritual art.

Among the modern theoreticians of art, Kandinsky appears as one of the first and most important inaugurators of this new conception. What is chiefly manifest in him is the divine fury which, in an age dominated by material exuberance, sets itself up in opposition to this materialism that it may found a new spiritual realm manifesting itself in signs, lines and colors, autonomous forces which are appropriate to the soul. The vision of the artist and the knowledge of the thinker meet here in an intense synthesis which was to be epoch-making in its total transformation of artistic creation.

Wassily Kandinsky's theoretical work includes three books of basic import: « On the Spiritual in Art » (1911), « A Glance at the Past — 1901 to 1913 », perhaps the most personal of his writings, and « Point and Line to Plane », (published in 1926 when he was teaching at the Bauhaus in Dessau), a work devoted chiefly to the graphic elements in artistic creation.

His later statements which appeared in the Parisian reviews « Cahiers d'Art » (1931) and « XX^e Siècle » (1933-39) complete and thereby confirm the theories expounded in his books, though here again he insists upon the irrational and mystical roots of art.

The Man

by WILL GROHMANN

Kandinsky was one of the most masterful personalities I have ever encountered. Seeing him, no one would ever have taken him for a painter, but rather for a diplomat or a scientist. The unerring order which prevails in his canvasses was typical of the man himself; it was manifest in his appearance, his way of speaking, of discussing things, of making a decision and of acting. This « presence to himself » which has been hailed in Goethe was characteristic of him as well. He was always on the alert, always ready for work, but also ready to receive things from the outside or to intervene. No one could ever quite tell whether he consciously separated his life from his work or whether, in his case, living and working alternated automatically —, or whether he felt any need to change the control levers. One rather had the impression that he was always the same, that he possessed a discipline which enabled him, without a break, to interrupt the act of working or living, to bring either one or the other to the foreground of consciousness quite naturally and at will.

Seeing further than most people, Kandinsky could be kindly, indulgent and comprehensive. He rarely grew angry, and then only when he came into conflict with baseness of character or slap-dash work. His sense of propriety in all things would suffer as a result, for his integrity and uprightness were present in his life no less than in his paintings.

He had no enemies other than those who, without knowing him, thought that they could judge his person unfavorably after an uncomprehending examination of his work. But wherever he was, his presence created so warm and harmonious an atmosphere that no one who knew him personally could help loving him.

Kandinsky and the Painting World

by CHARLES ESTIENNE

Even for those « subjected », once and for all, to the fascination of Kandinsky's art — even more for those who still resist the temptation — there is not, I believe, an art at the same time more simple yet more mysterious, and people might even say, pejoratively, more obvious and more obscure . . . To such an extent that judging by appearances

and exterior form, and while paying homage to the animation and extraordinary pictorial sense which shines out of the big compositions of the « fauvo-dramatic » period, one is tempted, after all, to consider the remaining works less abstract, than those of Vermeer and Henri Rousseau.

It is strange that: those who, for methodical reasons are attracted by the means, the mechanism of plastic abstraction more than by its reason and final object, have more or less the same reaction and find the first works of Kandinsky « better » than those of later periods.

Such is, precisely, the first experiment, although it is the most superficial one can make with this art. But here is the first lesson, and firstly for painters; and with all-necessary precautions even if this be an audacious anticipation, I state what follows: this is perhaps the first time, since the Renaissance, that an adventure of painters is more than, and something very different, from a series of fragmental acts of valour accomplished sporadically; this is the first time that each stroke of painting in a picture, each picture in its sequence, is not only an act of « pictorial valor » brilliantly and even generously accomplished, but it owes its light, its full and precise sense, to this light and this sense existing in the spiritual and plastic centre of the whole life work. All details and all pictures, are thus related to a conception of the whole, and it is this conception which is new, because it is not limited to the physical execution of an abstract idea — in the bad sense, that is to say to an idea that does not exist, to a general idea — but it achieves perfectly original creation, and, I would say, even uniquely so, of a universe of art endowed with its own laws and its own respiration. Indeed, here at last is the peculiarity and perhaps the « scandal », of the art of Kandinsky. It is impossible to taste fully the content without feeling, if only unconsciously, the subterranean ramifications and the secret grand unity. It is even far more, in reality, than a curious romantic abstractionism, than a vague oriental folklore . . . It is not a question of appreciating or not appreciating this art, when you consider how far painting has gone on the path of intellectual drama.

Other painters have had or still have a duty to record, with generosity, serenity, or despair, nearly always with constantcy and admirable courage, in short with an art which exists, in fact, the very honour of our culture, the crushing and almost crushed existence of mankind in the world of to-day. Kandinsky, probably alone has made his own universe — a universe of art — contained within the universe itself.

CHRONOLOGY

1866 Born in Moscow

1869-96 Education: In Florence, later in Odessa. Study of political economy and law at Moscow University.

1896 At the age of 30 begins study of painting at Royal Academy, Munich.

1902 Joins Sezession Group in Berlin and opens School of Painting.

1903-08 Travels widely through Europe and Africa; returns to Munich.

1910 First non-figurative drawing and watercolor. At the same time writes his book "On the Spiritual in Art", which is published in 1911 and has three editions by 1912. Also writes two plays.

1912 Foundation of "Der Blaue Reiter" together with Franz Marc. Their aim: Return to the basic elements of painting and primary experience of form and color with emphasis on the intellectual content of art.

1913 Publication of Kandinsky's poems illustrated by 56 woodcuts.

1914 Returns to Moscow.

1918 Named Professor at Academy of Fine Arts, Moscow.

1919 Becomes Director of Museum of Pictorial Culture in Moscow.

1920 Named Professor at University of Moscow.

1922 Joins the "Bauhaus" in Weimar as teacher.

1926 Kandinsky's second book "Point and Line to Plane" is published in Dessau.

1933 Leaves Germany for Paris. Settles in a studio in Neuilly-sur-Seine.

1944 Dies on December 13th in his home in Neuilly.

galerie chalette